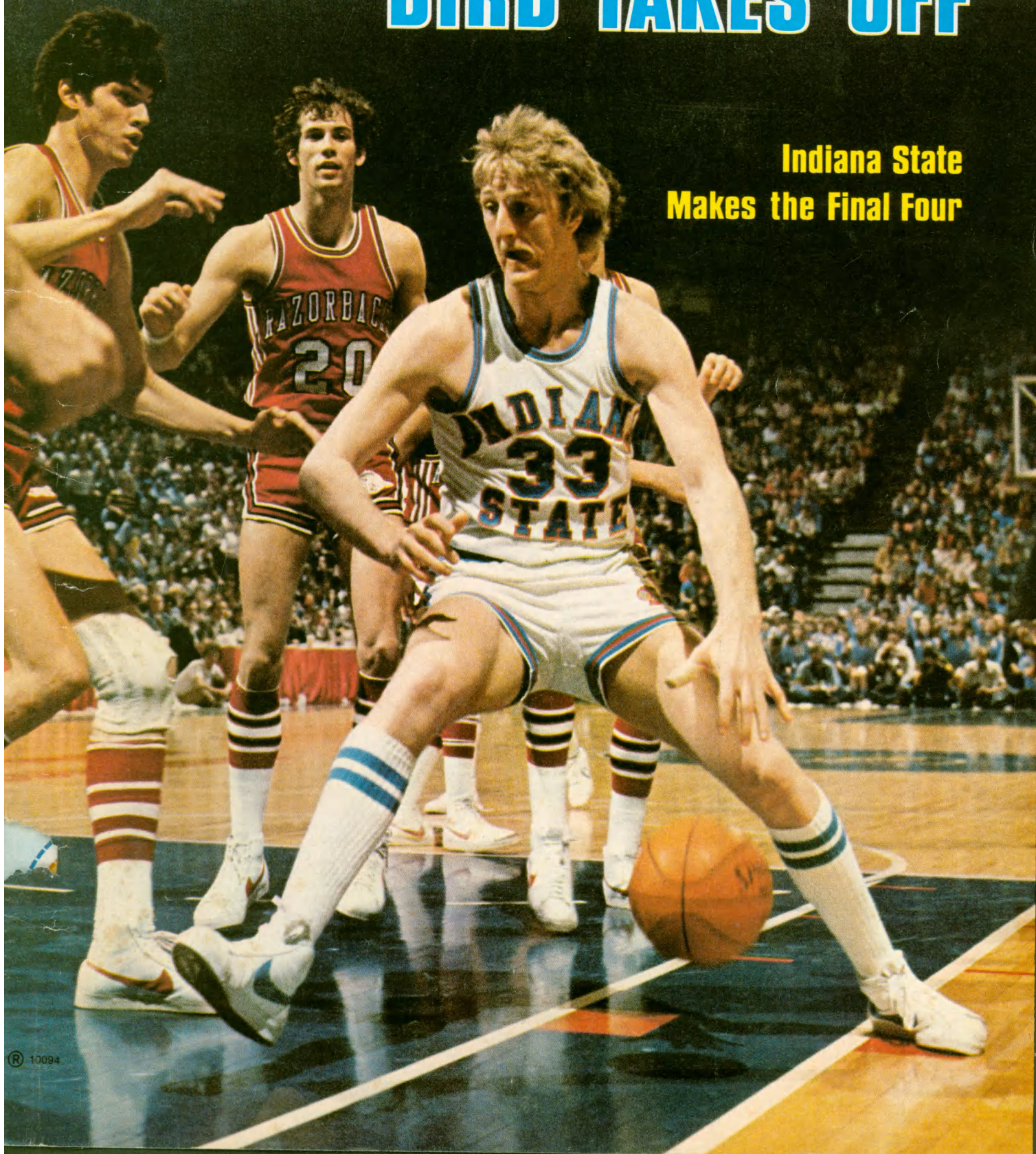


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BIRD TAKES OFF

Indiana State
Makes the Final Four

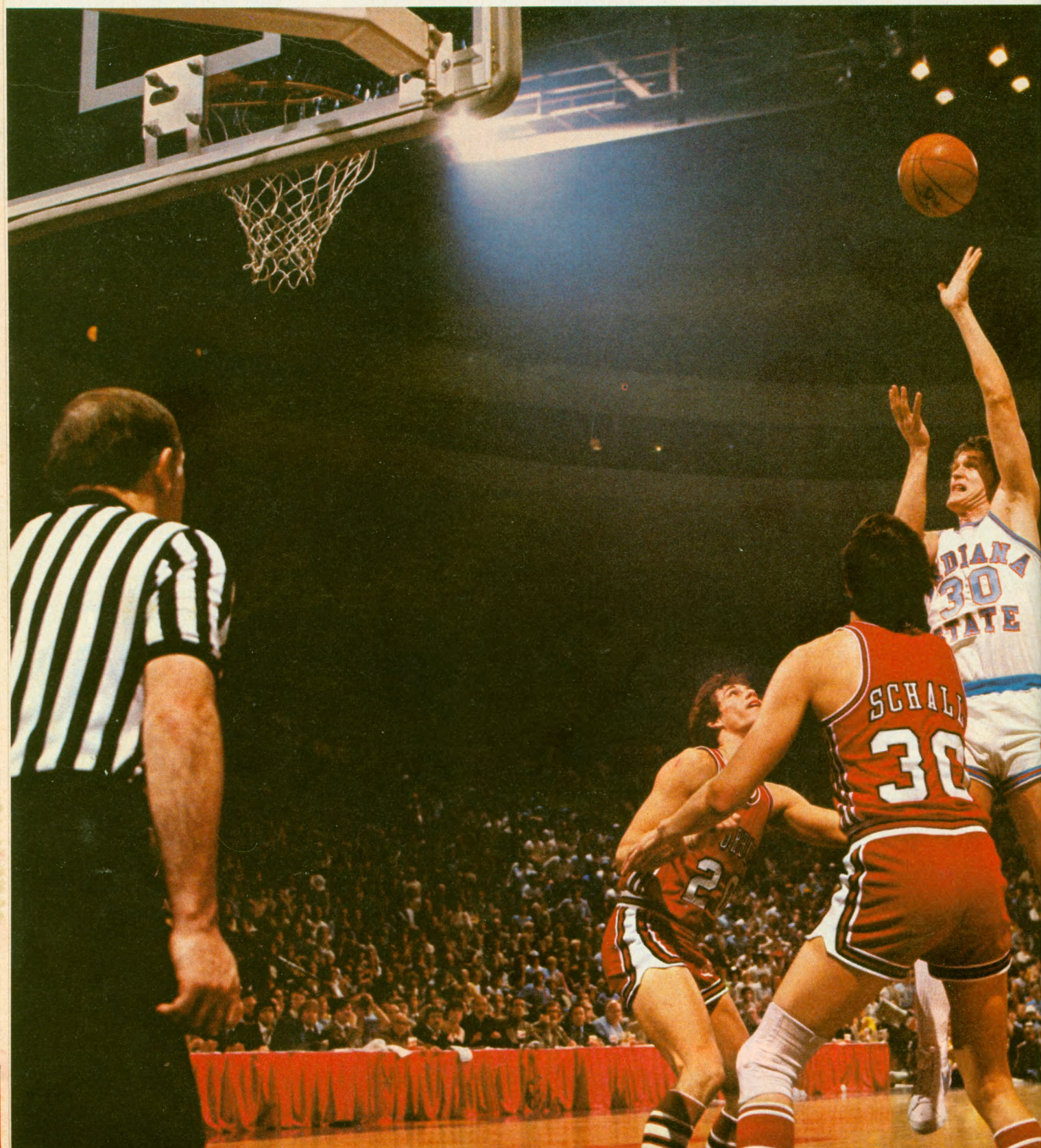


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AND FINALLY, THERE ARE FOUR



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While one of the pre-tournament favorites, Michigan State, worked its Magic in the Mideast, three upstarts—Penn, DePaul and, most notably, still-unbeaten Indiana State—qualified for trips to Salt Lake City



Now that Larry Bird has shot, passed and tight-lipped his way to the NCAA final four in Salt Lake City, the tournament committee should tell the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to get ready. No matter what Bird and his Indiana State buddies do this week, there will be plenty of cause for a few verses of the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Sportswriters will be happy to say bye-bye, Birdie because they can't get one word out of him. Opposing coaches will be delighted, because they can't beat him. And the NBA will be overjoyed that Bird finally is ready to bring his game into the league.

Bird was his typical self—remarkable—last week as the Sycamores provided an affirmative answer to college basketball's most pressing question: Is Indiana State for real? On Thursday night, in the Midwest Regional semifinal in Cincinnati, the 6' 9" Bird's all-round game accounted for 29 points and five assists in a surprisingly easy 93-72 win over Oklahoma. He then scored 31 to lead the Sycamores to a 73-71 victory over Arkansas that, ironically, was decided on a shot that should have been hauled away on the garbage truck that Bird used to drive back home in French Lick, Ind.

So now the team from Terre Haute is only two victories away from completing a most improbable success story. Ordinarily, considering that Americans are suckers for underdogs and small towns, it would be hard for anyone to pull against Indiana State at Salt Lake City. But there will be some other teams there bidding just as hard for the nation's heart. Upstart DePaul surprised UCLA to earn the semifinal spot opposite Indiana State for Ray Meyer, their aged, beloved and unsung coach. And in the championship game, the Indiana State-DePaul survivor will have to solve either the Magic of the Mideast Regional winner, Michigan State, or the mystery of the surprising Eastern champ, Penn.

The Sycamores' Heaton, a righty, used this left-handed shot with seconds left to beat Arkansas.

The Sycamores arrived in Cincinnati with something to prove to the skeptics among the nation's journalists and fans. The prevailing notion has been that while Bird is a great player, Indiana State had built its 30-0 record at the expense of a bunch of weak teams. In the semis, Indiana State figured to get a stiff test, at last, from Big Eight champ Oklahoma.

The game was close until Sooner Center Al Beal got a third foul with 7:43 to play in the first half. With Beal out, Bird led a spurt in which State turned a 33-30 deficit into a 45-37 halftime lead. In all, Beal played only 17 minutes before fouling out, which allowed the Sycamores to outrebound Oklahoma 50-22.

Across from the Indiana State bench, Arkansas Coach Eddie Sutton munched popcorn and looked for Sycamore weaknesses he might be able to exploit. The Razorbacks and their jewel of a guard, Sidney Moncrief, had earned their way into the final with a 73-62 win over Louisville. The Cardinals were uninspired until the Hogs took a 17-point lead midway through the second half. Then, with head dunker Darrell Griffith on the bench and a madman named Roger Burkman in his place, Louisville woke up and used a press to lead 56-55 with 5:50 to go. Now it was time for Moncrief to take charge, and he scored seven of his game-high 27 points in the next three minutes. Steady again, Arkansas pulled away.

The morning of the final game, Sutton tried to digest Bird with his bacon and eggs-over-easy. "You're not going to stop him, but you can slow him down," he said. "Where he hurts you most is with his passing. He's the best passer for a big man I've ever seen. We're going to start Alan Zahn on him, but we'll put Moncrief on him after a while. Sidney should do a good job, except inside, where Bird's got five inches on him. When we have the ball, we're going to try to be patient. Their defense is good for five or six passes, but then they have a tendency to get unaggressive."

A few hours later Sutton was nervous-

continued

Bird had scored 25 points in the first 27 minutes of play. Then Sutton decided it was time to put Moncrief on him. That created a tempting mismatch in height, but Indiana State smartly elected to take what Arkansas gave instead of trying to force the ball to Bird, who was rarely left open for an easy pass by the quick and tenacious Moncrief. Bird scored only six points down the stretch.

Nobody knew what Bird thought about the day's events, because he again declined to meet the press. Well, perhaps genius doesn't have to explain itself. At least he took part in the celebration on the floor. As he walked off, the Sycamore fans chanted, "Ayyy-men, Ayyy-men, Ayyy-men, Ay-men, Ay-men." The Mormon Tabernacle Choir couldn't have done it better.

With Johnson barking orders and getting 25 assists, the Spartans had the last word in the Mideast.



The day before the game, Johnson gave Kelser some special incentive to do well by kidding him that UCLA's David Greenwood is a better dunker. Better

than Kelser? Why, Kelser, who is 6' 7", has been dunking since he was a 5' 10" 14-year-old. "I wasn't supposed to do it, but my first one was in a gym class during a layup drill," he recalls. "After I dunked, the coach made me do 10 push-ups, but I was so excited I wanted to get up and dunk it again." Kelser had six jams against the Irish, and nobody told him to do his push-ups.

Notre Dame and Michigan State got to the finals with wins Friday over Toledo (79-71) and Louisiana State (87-71), respectively. As is their custom, the Irish didn't beat Toledo until the 11th hour. The Spartans, however, had very little trouble with LSU. Tiger Coach Dale Brown hoped that his team could take an early lead and then freeze the ball the rest of the game. That strategy fizzled when Kelser intercepted two passes and raced for driving dunks. These buckets lifted the Spartans to a 7-5 lead, and they never looked back as Johnson scored 24 points and had 12 assists.

With the preliminaries out of the way, Notre Dame and Michigan State could concentrate on each other. Their collision in the regional final had been anticipated all season, because they had begun the year as the area's highest-ranked teams and each spent some time as the No. 1 club in the nation. State Coach Jud Heathcote established the essential difference between the two when he said, "Notre Dame goes at you with nine players, and we come back at you with two."

As the Irish have shown, sometimes nine players can be a disadvantage. Every game is a war of attrition for Notre Dame, which specializes in wearing opponents down, but by making so many lineup changes, the Irish often lack the consistency, cohesiveness and individual spark of other outstanding teams. "We dillydally in the first half," says Hanzlik, "and count on a spurt at the end."

Michigan State has never had that kind of luxury. The Spartans have relied on five men plus a sub and a half all year, and now, with Center Jay Vincent nursing a sore foot, they have no depth at all. Heathcote believes success is not a matter of how many but who and where. After losing four of six games in January, he moved the 6' 8" Johnson from guard to forward, brought Brkovich off the bench to play guard and dropped Ron Charles, who started in Vincent's place last week, back to sixth man. "I analyzed



Theft by defensive Demons like Bradshaw led to lots of layups and to DePaul's victory over UCLA.

our club incorrectly at the start of the season," Heathcote says. "I thought Earvin could destroy people at guard, but I learned he needs the freedom of being able to set up inside and outside both."

Despite his redesignation as a forward, Johnson still handles the ball most of the time, and he is going to cause trouble no matter where he plays or who guards him. Notre Dame put its top defender, the 6' 7" Hanzlik, on Johnson, but the best defense may have been suggested by Kelser, who said, "If it were me, I'd say something about his mother and then hope he'd hit me and get ejected."

Johnson was not about to do anything as stupid as that against the Irish. After the Spartans' loss to Kentucky in last year's Mideast final, he wanted to win too much. "I don't think State will be back next year," he said. "Kelser is a senior, and as for me, I don't know what I'm going to do about the pros. So this is it. This is our chance right here."

As Notre Dame will long remember, they made the most of it. —LARRY KEITH

OUT WEST, DEPAUL HAD A BALL

For the first time since World War II, DePaul is in the final four of the NCAA tournament, and as if a wait of 36 years wasn't enough, the Blue Demons found their road to Salt Lake City to be the most rugged traveled by any of the four teams that will compete there. Because of the vagaries of the tournament selection process, they had to travel far from their Chicago home to play in Provo, Utah. They had to get by UCLA, not only the best shooting team (.555) in college basketball history, but also a team that had beaten them by 23 points in November. And, in an era when most good college teams use platoons of substitutes,

continued



After 36 years, Meyer is back in the semifinals.

they had to rely on only five men.

DePaul's bench, you see, consists of seven fellows whose toughest chore seems to be standing up during time-outs so that the members of the Fatigued Five can take a seat. The subs also clap and cheer a lot, and occasionally pass a cup of water down to Coach Ray Meyer. Two reserves played a blink more than one minute last Saturday afternoon in BYU's vast Marriott Center as the DePaul starters shot, rebounded and stole their way to a shocking 17-point halftime lead, and then wearily hung on to edge the Bruins 95-91.

Meyer, 65, has been coaching the Demons for 37 seasons, and although he has once before gone to the NCAA semis, has won an NIT and last season guided DePaul to a 27-3 record, this one could turn out to be the happiest of all because of his Fatigued Five. Most of the publicity has gone to chubby Mark Aguirre, a good shooter—his regular-season scoring average of 24.1 led the nation's freshmen—who has gradually improved his rebounding and defense. Guards Gary Garland and Clyde Bradshaw, both from New Jersey, and Forward Curtis Watkins shoot well, too, and excel at swiping passes. Six-nine Center Jim Mitchem this season jumps three inches higher than last because he lifted weights.

Thursday night in Provo, DePaul had a tough time with old rival Marquette, which the Demons had beaten by a point in February. DePaul trailed in the first

half by as many as nine and in the second half by eight, but fought back to win 62-56.

Many felt that the second game on Thursday, UCLA vs. USF, was going to decide the West's representative. The Bruins' weakest position by far, center, was precisely where the Dons had 7' 1" Bill Cartwright. UCLA trailed by two at halftime but buried the WCAC champions in the second half with a 73% shot-making performance. Guard Brad Holland hit six of eight field-goal attempts, and his backcourt mate, Roy Hamilton, was nine for nine to finish with 36 points.

By racing to a 99-81 win over a very strong team, the Bruins looked as if they would streak right past DePaul, Indiana State, the Washington Bullets or anybody else foolish enough to challenge them as they went after their 11th NCAA title. The only man in Provo who seemed to think otherwise was Meyer. Before the game he telephoned some prize high school recruits back in the Midwest and told them to be sure to watch what was going to happen on TV.

It was well worth seeing. Time after time the Demons stole passes or poked them away. The inside play of UCLA All-America David Greenwood was all that kept the first half from being a total disaster for the Bruins, who trailed by those 17 points at intermission.

At the end of halftime the rudeness of the UCLA band lost any local crowd support the Bruins might have had. A BYU student troupe was still putting on a Spanish dance show when the Bruins returned from their locker room and their band began blasting fight songs, drowning out the Spanish music. From then on the game might as well have been played in DePaul's Alumni Hall on West Belden Avenue. In fact, as the score grew close in the late stages of the second half, the crowd's support of the Demons perhaps made the difference in the game.

Substituting freely, pressing full-court and trapping DePaul dribblers, UCLA ate away at the lead. The Demons used a four-corners attack—if attack is the word—because Meyer had directed them to pass the ball around for a minute on each possession before attempting a shot. His strategy, which turned out to be a good one by the barest of margins, was to prevent UCLA from running off a rapid succession of second-half points, a Bruin trademark this season. And because he couldn't afford to have any of

his starters foul out, Meyer kept them in a zone defense, which Greenwood very nearly demolished. He finished with a career-high 37 points, many of them on two-handed dunks.

But UCLA had too much ground to make up. The Bruins got as close as two points and lost by four, as the Demons narrowly avoided living up to the ideals of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Apostle of Charity.

"This is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me," said Meyer, who may well be using the same line next month. Even if the Baron of Belden Avenue sees his team beaten in the semis or the final, there is still another thrill awaiting him this year. On April 30 he will get his own stained-glass panel in the Basketball Hall of Fame. Of course, he deserves it for his years of expert coaching, but they could've honored him on the basis of patience alone.

—JOE JARVIS

FOR PENN, THE PRICE WAS RIGHT

It was a nice ceremony, sort of peaceful and dignified right up to the end, when Penn Guard James Salters stepped up to the free-throw line and finally laid St. John's to rest. Salters' two free throws with 23 seconds to play and the score tied gave the Quakers a 64-62 victory in the East Regional championship game at Greensboro, N.C. last Sunday. But say this much for the Redmen: they didn't die easy.

St. John's had been found face up and barely breathing a number of times before. It had to win nine of its last 11 games to get a surprise bid to the NCAA tournament, and during the early rounds the Redmen looked ready to expire before struggling back to beat Temple, Duke and Rutgers. But Penn was too much to overcome. The Quakers were quick, especially in the backcourt, and their forwards, Tony Price and Tim Smith, stabbed the ball into the basket from long range when needed. But more than anything else, Penn was smart. "They'd better be smart," said St. John's Coach Lou Carnesecca. "Some-

day they'll be controlling our country."

Despite being from the Ivy League, the Quakers didn't acquire their reputation for braininess until they defeated North Carolina two weeks ago. Down in ACC territory, the locals assume that any team that beats one of their own must be doing it with something sneaky, like intelligence. This reputation for being cerebral instead of good will probably follow Penn all the way to Salt Lake City, but the Quakers insist they put their mortarboards on one leg at a time. "We've shown that we have the ability to play with anybody," says Salters. "We may be smart, but we make mistakes, too. When we beat a team, it's because we've outplayed them at basketball. Intelligence alone doesn't win games."

The Quakers needed all the guile they could summon to beat the Redmen. St. John's Forward Ron Plair had hit all nine of his shots, until his follow-up of Gordon Thomas' follow-up of Tom Calabrese's miss with 10 seconds remaining rattled harmlessly away. It was the last shot the Redmen would get. The 6' 7" Price, who played an otherwise impeccable game and finished with 21 points, missed a free throw with three seconds left, but St. John's was unable to get off another heave at the hoop.

Victory was almost more than Penn could dare ask for, though it certainly deserved its championship. When Sunday dawned and only six teams were still alive in the race for the national title, it was almost satisfaction enough for Pennsylvania and St. John's to find their names still on the list. The Redmen and the Quakers had not been considered exactly the roses of Eastern basketball this year; in fact, as the ninth and 10th seeds, respectively, in their region, they were, if anything, the lilies of the field. St. John's had been the last of the 40 teams invited by the tournament selection committee, and poor old Penn was having to put up with one indignity after another. At Thursday's semifinal games, for instance, vendors were selling Penn State buttons, though not a lot of them.

The reception that all four Eastern semifinalists received down in ACC country following Penn's upset of North Carolina and St. John's victory over Duke a week earlier was summed up by *The Greensboro Record* in a front-page story that called the invaders from the North, "These huns from Siberia." Without an area team left in the tournament,

the 15,683-seat Coliseum didn't rock. It rolled over and played dead. There were only 9,102 fans there for Friday's games, and then things got bad. Because Sunday's game was televised nationally, the Coliseum P.A. announcer made a pitiful request to the crowd for some noise, and what he got was the sound of one hand clapping. When the attendance of 7,216 was announced, the crowd booed itself.

This, then, was the regional in which everyone—including the arena—was an underdog; in which brains triumphed over brawn; and in which St. John's Center Wayne McKoy proved that he was "not just another big slunk out there."

It had been McKoy, after all, who had gotten the Redmen into the title game by banking in a shot with five seconds to go for a 67-65 win over Rutgers. After trailing by 10 points in the first half, St. John's had won because Scarlet Knight Center James Bailey, who had put on a shooting clinic in the first half, scored two points during the final 17 minutes. For reasons known only to the Rutgers guards, Bailey seldom touched the ball in the second half, and when he did he

was swallowed by St. John's zone, a defense Carnesecca, an ardent man-to-man man, had gone to in desperation.

In the other semifinal, Penn, with Price scoring 20 points, made surprisingly easy work of Syracuse, which had become the overwhelming favorite to win the regional once the ACC had been dispatched. The Quakers were helped by a bizarre officiating error late in the second half. In the midst of an Orange rally that shaved a 17-point deficit to five, the refs didn't allow Penn to shoot what should have been a one-on-one free-throw opportunity. It was almost a minute later, when the Quakers were fouled again, that the officials realized their mistake and ruled it a "correctable error." Penn was thus awarded four foul shots, all of which were made to throttle the Syracuse comeback. "Penn didn't surprise me," said Syracuse Coach Jim Boheim after losing 84-76. "I'm not from North Carolina. I know they're good."

Now Michigan State and perhaps Indiana State or DePaul will get a chance to find out if the Quakers are the best—or just the brightest. —BRUCE NEWMAN

Forty-one points by the Quakers' Price cost Syracuse and St. John's shots at the Eastern title.

